

Manitoba child care groups call for urgent help from province ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

WINNIPEG -- Child care advocates in Manitoba are calling on the provincial government to increase funding for child care programs, saying the situation was bad before the pandemic, and COVID-19 has just made it worse.

Four childcare organizations, including the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, Child Care is Essential, Child Care Now, and the Manitoba Child Care Association, have released a joint statement saying the childcare sector "urgently" needs increases in the money they receive from the province.

"The problems that the child care sector was facing pre-COVID have only been amplified over the last six months," said Jodie Kehl, the executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

Kehl said not-for-profit licensed child care centres receive funding through provincial operating grants and parent fees. She said the money from the province has not increased since 2016, and parent fees have not been increased since 2013.

She said despite the frozen funding, the operating expenses have continued to increase.

"Needless to say, the fact that the funding has remained frozen for so long, and then as a result of the pandemic – loss of revenue from the reduced parents' fees, challenges have surfaced very significantly for programs," she said.

"Centres are having a hard time, facilities are having a hard time reinstating staff and finding enough qualified early childhood educators to do the work that's needed to be done to provide licensed quality child care to Manitoba's children and families."

The child care organizations said before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the province had more than 37,000 spaces available, as well as a waiting list of more than 16,000 people. The organizations said there are currently 21,000 childcare spaces operating.

Kehl said there could be a number of reasons behind the drop in childcare spaces.

"Some of that is because families are fearful about bringing their children back for legitimate reasons, so they have decided not to bring their children back to child care. Some families are still working from home, so perhaps they have made other childcare arrangements so perhaps they don't need it right now," she said.

"I think as we move into September, we might have a clearer picture about where exactly we are standing with accessibility and availability for families."

She said if the operating grants don't increase, the quality of care Manitoba children receive could be at risk.

"I worry that we are compromising the quality of child care in our province," she said.

"Manitoba has long been looked at as a leader in this country, and I want us to continue to be that leader and be an example to other provinces and territories to see what quality licensed childcare means and how important it is for all citizens in society."

CTV News has reached out to the province for comment but has not yet heard back.

Region: Manitoba ^[4]

Tags: advocacy ^[5]

funding ^[6]

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[2] <http://mccahouse.org/province-failing-child-care-sector/>

[3] https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/manitoba-child-care-groups-call-for-urgent-help-from-province-1.5097057?fbclid=IwAR2-mUdPrh02h_MPpKOhzqL9of4qzewO7OjRsCUSFRvYZjnEV1NYGOIYe88

[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7857>

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